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Legends of Khotan and Nepal

By JOHN BROUGH

IT has already been noted by Professor F. W. Thomas¹ that there are several striking coincidences in religious topography between Buddhist Khotan and Nepal. In addition to place-names, however, there is also a considerable body of legendary tradition common to the two countries.

1. Both countries possess the legend that at one time the land was a lake which was drained through divine agency. This legend is of course very widespread. It is known also in Tibet,² and, in a Hindu version, in Kashmir.³ A more distant folk-lore parallel is probably to be recognized in the Hebrew tradition of Genesis i, 2. The versions of Khotan and Nepal, however, are particularly closely connected.

According to the account of the *Gośṛṅga-vyākaraṇa*,⁴ Śākyamuni at one time came to the hill of Gośṛṅga in Khotan. There he saw the great lake, and prophesied the future of the country. Among his attendants on this occasion the text mentions the Gandharva-king, Pañcaśikha. Finally, the Buddha ordered Śāriputra and Vaiśravaṇa to give the land manifest borders, and they, with monk's staff and lance respectively, "dried half of the mountain of Śa, and, taking it, set it down on the western side and made a great water course. The lake with its living beings they transferred into the middle of *Śo-rtsaṅ-po* [a mountain (?) on the north of the lake]. In this wise they disclosed the *stūpa* of Go-ma-sa-la-gan-da and the hill of Gośṛṅga and the land of Li."⁵

In Nepal the chief repositories of local legend are the *Svayambhū-purāṇa*⁶ and the Buddhist *Vaṃśāvalī*.⁷ The latter, compiled at the beginning of the nineteenth century, draws largely on the former for the legendary period, but has apparently utilized other sources as well. According to the account of the *Svayambhū-purāṇa*,⁷ Mañjudeva in early times came from the hill of Mañjuśrī in China to the valley of Nepal, which was originally a lake, Kālīhrada (Nāgahrada in the version of the *Vaṃśāvalī*). There he opened the six valleys on the south side of the lake, thus draining off the water. Further, at the south end of one of these valleys, Gandhavatī, he excavated a new lake, and built up a mountain beside the former Kālīhrada. On the top of this mountain

¹ *Tibetan Literary Texts and Documents from Chinese Turkestan*, vol. i, p. 6.

² E.g. *Dpag-bsam-ljon-bzan* (ed. Sarat Chandra Das), pp. 147, 148.

³ Stein, *Ancient Khotan*, p. 160; *Rājatarāṅginī*, vol. ii, pp. 388 f. (text, i, 25 ff.).

⁴ Thomas, *Texts*, i, 12-35; cf. also pp. 95, 307.

⁵ The work is known in three recensions, of which only the *Brhat-su-p.* has been published (Haraprasad Sastri, *Bibl. Ind.*, 1900), and in default of anything better, references are given here to this edition.

⁶ Cambridge Univ. Lib. Add. 1952a. The *History of Nepal* edited by D. Wright (1877) is a "translation" of this work.

⁷ pp. 166 ff.

he excavated a new lake, in which the Nāga-inhabitants of Kālīhrada were invited to take up their residence.¹

2. The centre of religious life in Khotan seems to have been the famous hill of Gośṛṅga, which Stein identified with the modern Kohmārī.² In the Tibetan *Gośṛṅga-vyākaraṇa*, the bodhisattva Mañjuśrī gives his special blessing and protection to the site on this hill where at a later date the monastery Par-spon-byed would arise.³

In Nepal, the chief sanctuary of Buddhism is the Svayambhū hill, situated about a mile and a half west of Kāthmaṇḍū. According to the *Svayambhū-purāṇa*,⁴ the name of this hill was Padmagiri in the Satya-yuga, because of its five lotuses made of jewels. In the Tretā-yuga it was called Vajrakūṭa, in the Dvāpara-yuga, Gośṛṅga, and in the Kali-yuga, Gopucchā. Close to the Svayambhū-caitya (according to Wright, on the western peak of the Svayambhū hill) is situated the Nepalese abode of Mañjuśrī, the Mañjuśrī-caitya.⁵

3. The foundation of the city of Khotan itself is attributed to a son of the Indian emperor Aśoka. This son, abandoned by his father, was miraculously suckled by the goddess Earth, who for this purpose caused a swelling to arise in the ground in the shape of a female breast. For this reason the child was called "Earth-Breast", *Go-stana*,⁶ a name afterwards transferred to the city which he founded. The account of the legend given by the Chinese pilgrim Hsüan Tsang places the miraculous feeding in Khotan itself.

Since this legend is so definitely attached to Khotan, being simply an attempt to explain the name of the town by a popular etymology, one would hardly expect to find it in Nepal, and it seems in fact not to have been of sufficient interest to the Nepalese to have found a place in the *Svayambhū-purāṇa*. It is all the more surprising therefore to find it in the *Vaṃśāvatī*. Here it is related that King Aśoka visited Nepal, and that on his return journey his wife Tiṣya-lakṣmī (Tiṣya-rakṣitā in *Divyāvadāna*, 397, etc.) gave birth to a son whom she suckled as she sat on the ground. For this reason the child was called Mahīpāna, "Earth-drink", and the same name was given to the place where he had been thus fed.⁷

4. The Khotan legend tells that the country was colonized by settlers

¹ p. 174. The text is very corrupt at this point, but the general sense seems certain.

² *Ancient Khotan*, pp. 185 ff. See also Lévi, *BEFEO.*, iv, 31, 40.

³ Thomas, *Texts*, i, 15.

⁴ pp. 8-9.

⁵ Wright, *History of Nepal*, p. 79.

⁶ The synonymous *Ku-stana*, which is one of the forms of the name found in the Central Asian Kharoṣṭhī documents (in the derivative *kustaṇaḡa*), has usually been employed by modern writers. But *Gostana*, already argued for by Lévi, *BEFEO.*, v, 258 f., has since been established as the indigenous form, Bailey, *BSOS.*, ix, 541; x, 919.

⁷ Wright, p. 111. The text in Camb. Univ. Lib. Add. 1952a, fol. 39a, reads: *aśok rājā, āphnā sahar jātū bhani, nepāl bāta jādā, tiṣya-lakṣmī rānī lāt nepāl āyā pachi, garbhadhān [sic] bhayā kī hunā le, nepāl bāta pharkī jādā bāfā mā putra janma bhayo ra, bātai mā basi dud pilāyā, tas nimitta, tyo rājakumār ko nām mahipān bhani prakhyāt bhai gayā, tas jaggā ko nām pani mahipān bhani prakhyāt bhai gayā.*

both from India and from China. In the version given in the *Annals of Li-yul*¹ the Chinese contingent was led by the eponymous founder Gostana, the adopted son of the King of China, but in fact the son of Aśoka. The Indian contingent arrived later under a minister of Aśoka named Yaśas—a name which is known elsewhere also in connection with Aśoka, e.g. *Divy.* 382, etc. In the version of Hsüan-tsang, it is the eldest son of Aśoka who brought the Indians, the Chinese having arrived under an unnamed son of the Chinese emperor. The *Gośṅga-vyākaraṇa*² makes Hjañ-śo, who is presumably the same as Yaśas, a minister of the Chinese emperor. Clearly the details of the legend have been considerably confused in transmission.

The *Svayambhū-purāṇa* recounts that many people had accompanied Mañjuśrī from China on his first visit to the Svayambhū hill, and these presumably are to be understood as the first settlers. At the same period the former Buddha Viśvabhū came to Nepal in the company of a King Parvata, bringing with him many cultivators from India.³ The Purāṇa also ascribes a second wave of Indian immigration to the period of the Buddha Krakucchanda, and mentions that at this time a certain Dharmākara, King of China, was made King of Nepal.⁴ According to the *Vaṃśāvalī* this Dharmākara was succeeded by Dharmapāla, who had come to Nepal with Krakucchanda, that is, from India.⁵

5. The Nepalese sources tell that in the time of the Buddha Kanaka a certain bhikṣu called Dharmaśrīmitra set out from Central India to visit Mañjuśrī on his hill in China, in order to learn from him the mystic significance of the mantra of twelve letters. In Nepal, however, just north of the Svayambhū hill, he met Mañjuśrī in the guise of a peasant ploughing with a lion and a tiger. Mañjuśrī gave him hospitality for the night, and afterwards revealing himself to him, gave him the desired instruction.⁶

There is no direct mention of such a legend in the Tibetan accounts of Khotan. But it is perhaps not too far-fetched to see a reminiscence of it in the bilingual Sanskrit-Khotanese document published by Bailey, *BSOS.*, IX, 521 ff. In the curious disjointed dialogue contained in this document, one speaker, it seems, has just set out from Khotan to go to China in order to learn from Mañjuśrī, while the other speaker questions him about his object. When asked about his preference in the matter of scripture, the traveller replies that he prefers the Vajrayāna books, that is, precisely the same sort of Tantric mysticism which is the subject of the Nepalese story. The document, it seems, is a schoolboy's exercise in translation, and it would of course be perfectly natural for the subject matter of such an exercise to be taken from a well known local legend.

6. In the Tibetan *Prophecy of the Li Country* it is related that two nuns who were arhants came to Khotan from Kashmir, and chose for the site of

¹ Thomas, *Texts*, i, 97 ff.

² *Ibid.*, i, 17 f.

³ pp. 141 ff., 147.

⁴ pp. 247 ff.

⁵ Wright, p. 83.

⁶ *Svayambhū-purāṇa*, pp. 321 ff.; Wright, pp. 84-5.

a monastery the land of a certain householder called Na-mo-bod. This place, they said, was sanctified by the fact that there in former times the bodhisattva Sa-señ had given away his two children to a Brahman. The householder thereupon presented them with the land, and they built on it the monastery Na-mo-ñbu-gdon.¹

The Nepalese *Vamśāvalī*² mentions a mountain named Namobuddhā, and relates of it, not the story of Viśvantara as in the Khotan version, but the equally famous story of Mahāsattva, son of King Mahāratha, who gave up his life for the sake of a hungry tigress. In the version of this story in the *Suvarṇaprabhāsa-sūtra*, the locality is given as the country of the Pañcālas, and the *Vamśāvalī* turns this to account by making Mahāratha king of Panāvati (Panauti), a village some eight miles south-east of Bhātgaon, and about five miles from the Namobuddhā mountain. The statement of the *Vamśāvalī* that Panauti was formerly called Pañcāla is of course merely a worthless popular etymology. But the attachment of the legend to the Namobuddhā mountain was not merely a personal fancy of the author of the *Vamśāvalī*, and its general acceptance in Nepal is confirmed by the fact that the Newari *Aṣṭamī-vrata-māhātmya* gives a close paraphrase of the *Suvarṇaprabhāsa* version of the Mahāsattva story, and here the scribe has noted in the margin as a chapter-heading, "The Story of Namobuddhā" (*namobuddhā-yā kha*).³

7. The Tibetan accounts refer to five forts in Khotan, and the city itself is described as the "Five-fold" (*lha-lan*). Elsewhere it has the mysterious epithet "Nectarean" (*dnar-lan*), and it is not impossible that this is a mere scribal corruption of *lha-lan*, the two being almost indistinguishable in pronunciation in later Tibetan. The Chinese sources attribute five cities to the country of Khotan, and in spite of Professor Thomas's misgivings,⁴ this may simply refer to the same fact.

The Nepalese legend tells that in the time of the Buddha Kāśyapa a king of Bengal, Pracanda, became a bhikṣu, taking the name of Śāntikara, and built five temples in the valley of Nepal, one to Śaṃvara in Śāntipurī, to Vasundharā in Vasupurī, to Varuṇa in Nāgapurī, to Vāyu in Vāyupurī, and to Agni in Agnipurī. These five are called collectively *pañcapurī*.

It is of interest to add that at a later period of his career this Śāntikara made for himself a cave, called Guṇagarta,⁵ in which he dwelt in meditation, thus providing a parallel with the arhant of Khotan, Gomasala-gandha, who dwelt in the cave in Gośṛṅga.⁶

¹ Thomas, *Texts*, i, 133; cf. also Bailey, *BSOAS.*, X, 923.

² Wright, p. 110.

³ Cambridge Univ. Lib. Add. 1396, fol. 99b. I hope shortly to publish an edition and translation of this text.

⁴ *Asia Major*, ii, 256. Cf. also Bailey, *BSOAS.*, X, 923-4.

⁵ So R. Mitra, *Buddhist Literature of Nepal*, p. 257, probably correctly. The Bibl. Indica edition, p. 487, has the unintelligible reading, *gurum gartlam*.

⁶ Stein, *Ancient Khotan*, pp. 186 ff.

The above instances doubtless do not exhaust the possible list of parallels between Khotan and Nepal. Enough, however, has been cited to show that a chance coincidence is most improbable. How then is the situation to be accounted for? Only a tentative answer can at present be given. It seems nevertheless most probable that the whole cycle of legends originally belonged to Khotan, and that they have been bodily transferred to Nepal at a later date. The fact that the Nepalese sources are considerably later in date than those for Khotan is in itself hardly significant. The most decisive argument lies in the real significance of the Earth-breast story as a piece of popular etymology for the name of Khotan, whereas in Nepal it has no *raison d'être* at all. In Khotan, again, the presence of a Chinese element in the population is well attested by the use of Chinese place names, not only in the Tibetan sources, but also in native Khotanese documents. In Nepal, on the other hand, there are no grounds for assuming a Chinese colonization. The bulk of the Buddhist population, it is true, are speakers of an Indo-Chinese language, Newari. But it seems most improbable that they would ever have seriously considered themselves to be Chinese. The name of the sacred hill, Gośṛṅga, is regularly used in Khotan, whereas in Nepal the explanation that it was the name of the Svayambhū hill in a former age has every appearance of an afterthought.

A further argument in favour of the priority of Khotan may be seen in the name *Namobuddhā*, which in Nepal is mentioned only as a place-name. Wright prints it as *Namobuddha*, but the manuscript of the *Vaṃśāvalī* and the *Aṣṭamī-vrata* both have -ā. This form has no very obvious explanation either from Sanskrit or Newari. It is, moreover, an unusual sort of name for a place. On the other hand, as a personal name, the type is well known, though so far as I am aware it is not common among Buddhists. In South India, names such as *Namaḥ-śivāya Mudaliyār* are not uncommon, and Western Puritanism provides examples of personal names such as *Glory-to-God*, or *Praise-Jehovah*. As a man's name, then, *Namobuddhaḥ* can be readily understood as a nominative manufactured for the exclamation *namo buddhāya*, and it is found in this form in Khotanese itself, as *Namaubudā*, represented in the Tibetan account by *Na-mo-bod*. From the man's name, the name of the place connected with him is formed by the suffix -ānā, -ām, thus **Namaubudām*, Tib. *Na-mo-ḥbu-gdon*.¹ If such a name were then transferred to Nepal, it would naturally appear as *Namobuddhā*, since a final nasal could be understood, if at all, only as a Sanskrit accusative case-ending, and would therefore not be felt to be part of the word itself.

Again, in Nepal, the name *pañcapurī* is hardly a natural one for five temples, whereas it would be perfectly apposite to the five forts of Khotan. But in any case, it is possible that the application of the term *lha-ldan* to the forts of Khotan may be secondary, and that the original application was to the hill of Gośṛṅga itself, and that it was so called as being the local representative of the famous Five-peaked Hill of Mañjuśrī in China. It is true that the sources for Khotan

¹ Cf. Bailey, *BSOAS.* X, 923.

do not directly assert such a relationship. But, as we have seen, in the legends as transferred to Nepal, the Svayambhū hill takes the place of the Khotanese Gośṛṅga, and it is therefore not improbable that some of its attributes, even though not transmitted to us in the Khotan sources, may nevertheless really belong originally to Khotan. Now, the Svayambhū hill is clearly thought of as a local representative of the Chinese hill of Mañjuśrī. Its five jewelled lotuses in the Satya-yuga are obviously the reflection of the five jewelled peaks of the Chinese hill, which are in fact mentioned later by the *Svayambhū-purāṇa* itself¹; and the name *Pañcaśīrṣa* is given to Mañjuśrī's Chinese home.² It is possible that the Gandharva-king Pañcaśikha owes his place in the Khotan legend to the same fact. If then we may assume that the Khotan Gośṛṅga equally represents the Chinese hill, the conjecture may be hazarded that the Chinese name of Gośṛṅga current in Khotan *Niu-t'ou-san* (*ngiəu-d'əu-san*, Karlgren 673, 1015, 849) "Ox-head Hill", may be simply a local corruption or popular etymology of *U-t'ai-san* (*nguo-d'ai-san*, K. 1280, 964) "Five-terrace Hill". Some slight support for this may be seen in the fact that the Tibetan rendering of the name varies in our texts between *hgehu-to-san* and *hgehu-te-san*.

A possible explanation for the transfer of the legend-cycle from Khotan to Nepal might lie in the Tibetan use of the name Li. As is well known, Li-yul was the old Tibetan name of Khotan. But after the disappearance of Khotan as an independent kingdom, a good deal of uncertainty seems to have been felt about the location of Li-yul. Thus, S. C. Das writes, "Li-yul is identified with Nepal by the translators of the Kahgyur. I have been able to ascertain that the ancient name of Nepal was Li-yul."³ Again, Das translates from "Dsam-ling Gyeshe",⁴ by Tsanpo Noman Khan: "The country called Thokar by the Tibetans and vulgarly Malaya Phokhar or Little Phokhar is identified by some with Li-yul. . . . Li-yul was situated to the north of Tibet. Many Tibetan authors in their descriptions of Li-yul have confounded its position. Some say Li-yul is in Mongolia, some say Li-yul is a province of Tibet; according to others Li is Pal-yul (Nepal)."⁵ Rockhill, who correctly saw that Li was Khotan, was nevertheless unduly sceptical of other renderings at a later date, and remarks, "The only passage in Tibetan writers which places Li-yul south of Tibet is in E. Schlagintweit's *Könige von Tibet*, p. 850."⁶ But in Tāranātha's *History of Buddhism*, Aśoka is said to have conquered all India, in the north as far as "the Himālaya and the glacier region beyond the land of Li" (*byan-phyogs kha-ba-can dan, li-yul-gyi rgyab-kyi gaṅs dan*).⁷ In this context, Nepal is certainly better historical sense than Khotan, and may well have been intended by Tāranātha. There is, however, no possible ambiguity in the mention by the author of the *Dpag-bsam-ljon-bzan* of the Great Caitya of Nepalese Li, i.e.

¹ p. 157.

³ *JASB.*, 50 (1881), p. 223.

⁵ *JASB.*, 55, p. 201.

⁷ Ed. Schiefner, p. 27.

² pp. 322, 324.

⁴ *hdzam-glin-rgyans-bśad*.

⁶ *Life of the Buddha*, p. 230.

Svayambhū (*bal-po li mchod-rten chen-po*).¹ We may therefore imagine that some Tibetan lama who was familiar with the old Tibetan texts dealing with the legends and traditions of Li had attributed them to Nepal. The Nepalese who, as Hodgson found, held the Tibetans in high esteem in religious matters², would doubtless not have been averse to accepting such a revelation, and would assuredly have had little difficulty in finding appropriate sacred sites to adorn with the legends.

¹ Ed. S. C. Das, p. 170.

² Cf. also Hodgson, *Essays on the Languages, Literature and Religion of Nepāl and Tibet*, p. 21, note: "The temples of Kasachit and of Swayambhu Nátha though situated in the valley of Nepaul, are almost exclusively in the keeping of the Tibetans, and Lamas are the permanent ministering functionaries."